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High School Drop-out Rate at Record Low

# Hispanic High School Graduates Pass Whites in Rate of College Enrollment

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## About this Report

This report is mainly based on data published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in its “College Enrollment and Work Activity of High School Graduates” [news releases](#). The original data source is the October school enrollment supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS). Collected by the Census Bureau, the CPS is best known as the source for the monthly national unemployment rate and other labor force statistics. Each October since 1956 the CPS has included a supplemental questionnaire on school and college enrollment in the current and past year. Each month the CPS surveys about 60,000 households or about 135,000 persons. Further information on the October CPS can be found in the most recent “College Enrollment and Work Activity of High School Graduates” release or Davis and Bauman ([2011](#)).

The CPS is nationally representative of the civilian noninstitutionalized population.

This report was written by Richard Fry and Paul Taylor. Research Assistant Eileen Patten expertly formatted the tables and figures. Patten and Research Associate Wendy Wang number-checked the report. Molly Rohal was the copy editor. The authors appreciate the expertise and input of Associate Director Mark Hugo Lopez.

## A Note on Terminology

The terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” are used interchangeably in this report.

Unless otherwise noted, the terms “whites,” “blacks,” and “Asians” include both the Hispanic and the non-Hispanic components of their populations.

A “recent high school graduate” refers to a 16- to 24-year-old who completed high school in the calendar year (January through October) of the survey. The vast majority of graduates finished high school by obtaining a high school diploma, but those obtaining a GED or other equivalency are included.

An “immediate college entrant” or “recent college entrant” refers to a recent high school graduate who in October following graduation reports being enrolled in a college or university. Enrollment in trade schools, on-the-job training or correspondence courses is only considered as college enrollment if it advances the high school graduate toward a college, university or professional degree.

A “recent high school dropout” refers to a 16- to 24-year-old who reports not being enrolled in October of the survey year, attended school a year earlier, and did not have a high school diploma.

## 1. Overview

A record seven-in-ten (69%) Hispanic high school graduates in the class of 2012 enrolled in college that fall, two percentage points higher than the rate (67%) among their white counterparts,<sup>1</sup> according to a Pew Research Center analysis of new data from the U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>2</sup>

This milestone is the result of a long-term increase in Hispanic college-going that accelerated with the onset of the recession in 2008 ([Fry and Lopez, 2012](#)). The rate among white high school graduates, by contrast, has declined slightly since 2008.

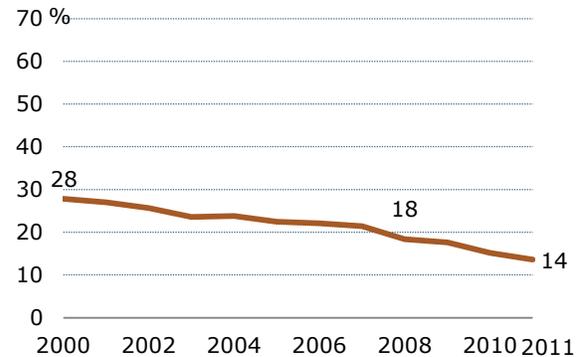
The positive trends in Hispanic educational indicators also extend to high school. The most recent available data show that in 2011 only 14% of Hispanic 16- to 24-year-olds were high school dropouts, half the level in 2000 (28%). Starting from a much lower base, the high school dropout rate among whites also declined during that period (from 7% in 2000 to 5% in 2011), but did not fall by as much.

Despite the narrowing of some of these long-standing educational attainment gaps, Hispanics continue to lag whites in a number of key higher education measures. Young

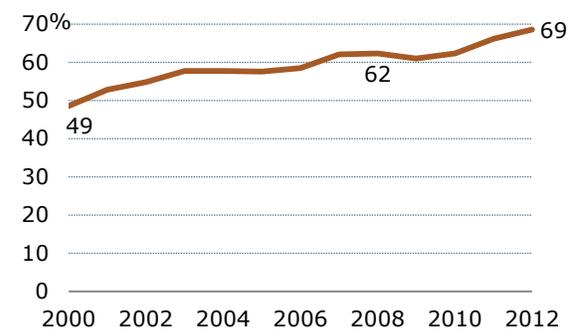
Figure 1

### Hispanic Education on the Rise

Share of Hispanic Youth Dropping out of High School at a Record Low ...



And Share of Hispanic High School Graduates Immediately Enrolling in College at Record High



Notes: The top figure shows the status high school dropout rate for Hispanic 16- to 24-year-olds. The bottom figure shows the immediate college entry rate for recent Hispanic high school graduates. Due to the small sample size for Hispanics, a 3-year moving average is used. The 3-year moving average uses the year indicated, the year immediately preceding and the year immediately following. For 2012 a 2-year moving average is used.

Source: For dropouts, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) [Digest of Education Statistics, 2012](#), Table 116. For immediate college entry, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, annual "College Enrollment and Work Activity of High School Graduates" [news releases](#), and National Center for Education Statistics [The Condition of Education 2012](#), Indicator 34.

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<sup>1</sup> Because the microdata for the October 2012 Current Population Survey are not yet publicly available, a standard error for these rates cannot be calculated. The two percentage point difference between the Hispanic rate and white college entry rate may not be statistically significant.

<sup>2</sup> The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the 2012 immediate college entry rates in an April 17, 2013 [release](#). The press release indicates that 70% of recent Hispanic graduates were enrolled in October 2012. That is the one-year rate. This report follows National Center for Education Statistics practice and reports the two-year moving average (69%).

Hispanic college students are less likely than their white counterparts to enroll in a four-year college (56% versus 72%), they are less likely to attend a selective college,<sup>3</sup> less likely to be enrolled in college full time, and less likely to complete a bachelor's degree.

It is possible that the rise in high school completion and college enrollment by Latino youths has been driven, at least in part, by their declining fortunes in the job market. Since the onset of the recession at the end of 2007, unemployment among Latinos ages 16 to 24 has gone up by seven percentage points, compared with a five percentage point rise among white youths. With jobs harder to find, more Latino youths may have chosen to stay in school longer.

Another factor, however, could be the importance that Latino families place on a college education. According to a 2009 Pew Hispanic Center survey, 88% of Latinos ages 16 and older agreed that a college degree is necessary to get ahead in life today ([Pew Hispanic Center, 2009](#)). By contrast, a separate 2009 survey of all Americans ages 16 and older found that fewer (74%) said the same ([Pew Research Social & Demograph Trends, 2009](#)).

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<sup>3</sup> Selectivity refers to the degree of difficulty of admission to a college. The National Center for Education Statistics examined the postsecondary experiences of the 2002 high school sophomore class. By 2006 22% of Hispanic sophomores had initially attended a four-year college, compared with 46% of non-Hispanic whites. Of those initially attending a four-year college, 85% of whites attended a moderately selective or highly selective institution, compared with 60% of Hispanics ([Bozick and Lauff, 2007](#)).

## 2. Immediate Entry into College

In October 2012 66% of all recent high school completers were enrolled in college. Among Hispanics who had recently graduated high school, 69% were enrolled.

As recently as the class of 2000, only 49% of Hispanic high school graduates immediately enrolled in college the following fall. Since then general college-going has increased among all of the nation's high school graduates, but it has risen the most—by 20 percentage points—among Hispanic high school graduates.<sup>4</sup>

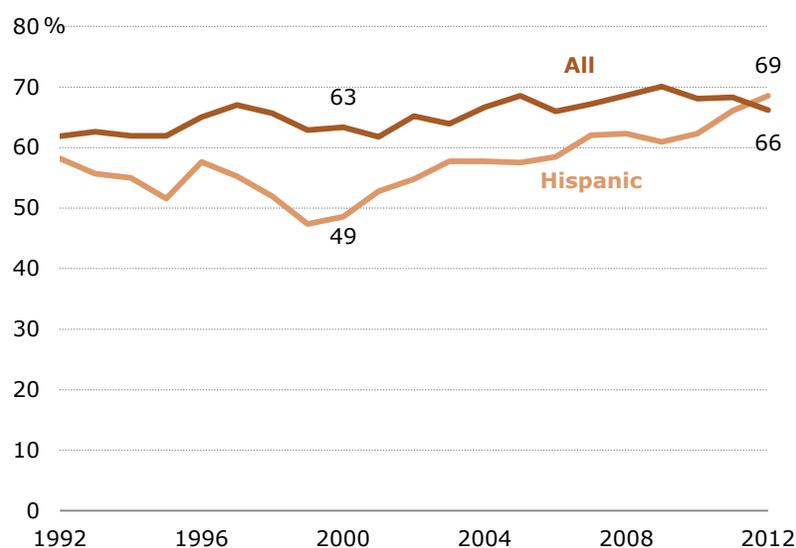
In the class of 2012 Hispanic high school graduates (69%) were more likely to be

enrolled in college in October 2012 than either whites (67%) or blacks (63%). In 2012 Asian recent high school completers were the most likely of the major racial and ethnic groups to be enrolled in college in October (84%).

Figure 2

### Hispanic Increase in Immediate Entry into College, 1992-2012

(Share of recent high school completers enrolled in college the following October)



Notes: Due to the small sample size for Hispanics, a 3-year moving average is used. The 3-year moving average uses the year indicated, the year immediately preceding and the year immediately following. For 2012 a 2-year moving average is used. "High school completer" refers to those who have received a high school diploma or equivalency certificate.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, annual "College Enrollment and Work Activity of High School Graduates" [news releases](#), and National Center for Education Statistics [The Condition of Education 2012](#), Indicator 34.

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<sup>4</sup> It is not possible to conclude whether 2012 is the first time that the Hispanic immediate college entry rate has exceeded the national rate. The National Center for Education Statistics publishes tables showing the national immediate college entry rate beginning in 1960. Statistics on Hispanics first become available in October 1972, when the Census Bureau began asking CPS respondents about their Hispanic identity. But the Hispanic population was much smaller in the 1970s, resulting in less statistical precision of the estimated Hispanic college entry rate during that period. Furthermore, in 1992 the CPS changed the question on educational attainment from asking about years of schooling completed to asking about degree attainment making data prior to 1992 not strictly comparable to today.

Data on traditional college enrollment from October 2011 indicate that Hispanics and whites tend to attend different kinds of colleges and have different rates of degree completion.

In October 2011, some 72% of white 18- to 24-year-old college students were enrolled at four-year colleges or universities compared with 56% of Hispanic college students.

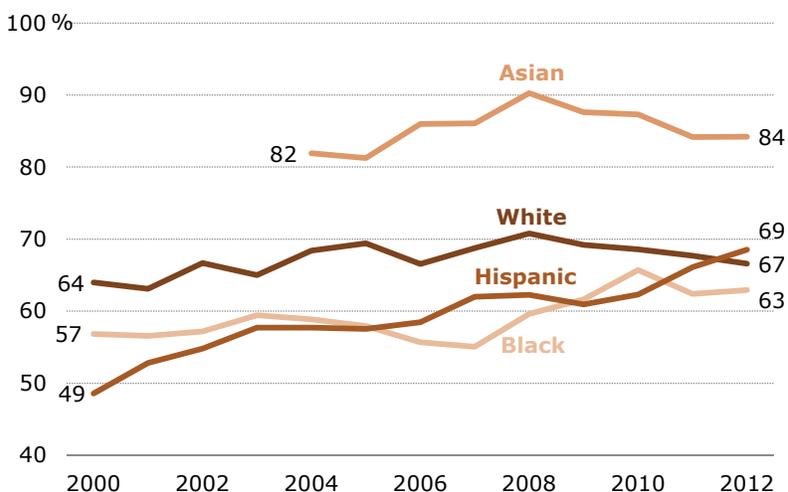
Also, among college students attending a four-year college or university, whites are more likely than their Hispanic counterparts to be at an academically selective institution ([Bozick and Lauff, 2007](#)).

When young Latinos go to college they are less likely than their white counterparts to be enrolled full time. In October 2011 only 78% of Hispanic 18- to 24-year-old college students were enrolled full time. By comparison, 85% of similar whites were enrolled full time.

Partly reflecting these differences in college-going and other factors, young Latinos are less likely than their white counterparts to complete a bachelor's degree. According to Census Bureau data, in March 2012 22% of white 22- to 24-year-olds had attained at least a bachelor's degree. Young Latinos were half as likely to have finished a four-year college degree (11%).

**Figure 3**  
**Immediate Entry into College by Race and Ethnicity, 2000-2012**

(Share of recent high school completers enrolled in college the following October)



Notes: White, black and Asian include the Hispanic portion of those groups. Due to the small sample size for Hispanics, blacks and Asians, a 3-year moving average is used. The 3-year moving average uses the year indicated, the year immediately preceding and the year immediately following. For 2012 a 2-year moving average is used.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, annual "College Enrollment and Work Activity of High School Graduates" [news releases](#), and National Center for Education Statistics [The Condition of Education 2012](#), Indicator 34.

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**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of College Students Ages 18-24, October 2011**

(%)

	Enrolled at 4-year college/univ.	Enrolled full time
<b>All</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>85</b>
Hispanic	56	78
White	72	85
Black	66	85
Asian	79	91

Note: White, black and Asian include the Hispanic portion of those groups.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center analysis of the October 2011 Current Population Survey.

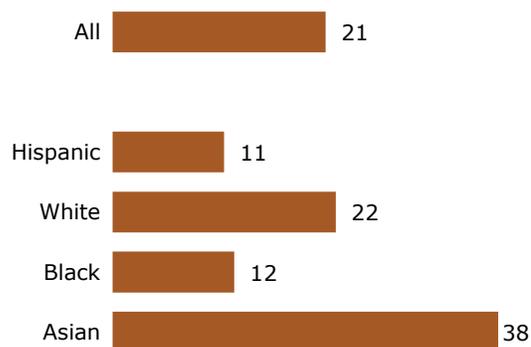
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Finally, the finding that the immediate college entry rate for Latinos in 2012 (69%) exceeds that of whites (67%) does not imply that young Latinos are more likely to attend college than young whites. Recent high school completers are only a subset of youth. Some youth recently dropped out of high school, others dropped out in earlier years, and some were never enrolled in U.S. schools. The immediate college entry rate only refers to youth recently graduating high school. Furthermore, it is possible that a youth could delay attending college after being out of high school for some time.

It is beyond the scope of this report to explain why Hispanic college-going among recent high school graduates has steeply increased. Since 2008 the Hispanic immediate college entry rate has increased from 62% to 69%. The white immediate entry rate declined from 71% in 2008 to 67% in 2012.

One possible explanation for the divergence in college-going between Hispanics and whites since the Great Recession is the different labor market circumstances these groups have faced. Hispanic and white youth tend to live in different parts of the country, and, overall, the employment opportunities since the onset of the recession deteriorated

**Figure 4**  
**Share of 22- to 24-year-olds**  
**Completing at Least a Bachelor's**  
**Degree, 2012**  
(%)

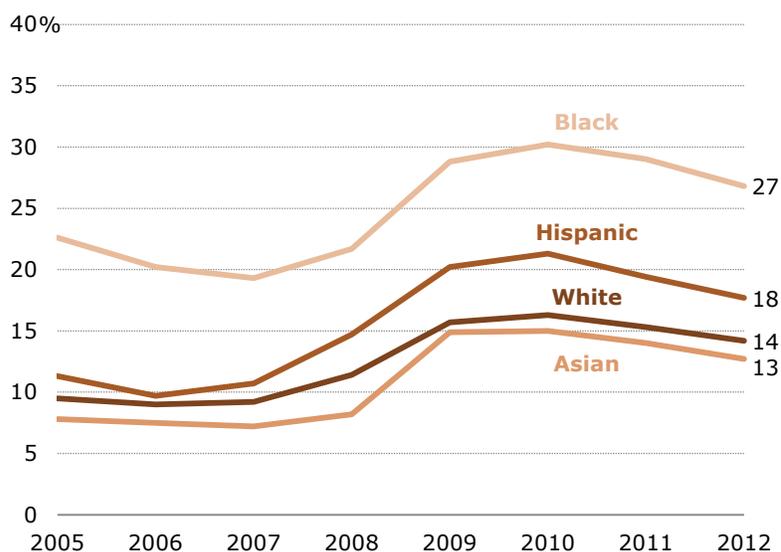


Note: White, black and Asian include the Hispanic portion of those groups.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center analysis of the March 2012 Current Population Survey

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**Figure 5**  
**Unemployment Rate of 16- to 24-year-olds,**  
**2005-2012**



Note: White, black and Asian include the Hispanic portion of those groups.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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more for Hispanic youth than for white youth.

Since 2007 the Hispanic 16- to 24-year-old unemployment rate has increased by seven percentage points, compared with a five percentage point increase among white 16- to 24-year-olds. With fewer opportunities to find jobs, it is possible that more young Latinos decided to extend their education. However, the Pew Research Center has not rigorously analyzed the relationship between the labor market and college-going; thus we simply note the correlation without drawing a causal connection.

### 3. Young Hispanics Dropping Out of High School

The newly released October 2012 data from BLS also indicate that young Hispanics are much less likely to drop out of high school than they were in 2000. In October 2012 there were 134,000 Hispanic recent high school dropouts. By definition these were Hispanic 16- to 24-year-olds who reported not being enrolled in school in October 2012 but were enrolled a year earlier and did not have a high school diploma. This compares with 101,000 recent Hispanic high school dropouts in October 2000. Although the absolute number of Hispanic recent high school dropouts has risen, there are many more Hispanic students enrolled in school in October 2012 compared with October 2000.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics does not publish the number of 16- to 24-year-olds who were enrolled in school last year and did not have a high school diploma, so a precise recent high school dropout rate cannot be tabulated. Instead we can compare the number of dropouts to the size of the high school graduating classes. In October 2000 there were three newly minted Hispanic high school graduates for every one recent Hispanic high school dropout. By October 2012 there were five newly minted Hispanic high school graduates for every one dropout. Young Hispanics are increasingly staying in school.

By this measure, dropping out also has sharply declined among 16- to 24-year-old whites since 2000. The ratio of black high school graduates to black dropouts has not markedly changed from October 2000 to October 2012.

The trends on Hispanic recent school dropouts are consistent with other better known Hispanic dropout statistics. The National Center for Education Statistics reports the high

Table 2

#### Recent High School Dropouts, 1999-2000 and 2011-2012

	<b>1999-2000</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>
	Number (in thousands)	
<b>All</b>	<b>515</b>	<b>370</b>
Hispanic	101	134
White	384	197
Black	111	124
Asian	---	19
	Ratio of number of recent high school completers to dropouts	
<b>All</b>	<b>5:1</b>	<b>9:1</b>
Hispanic	3:1	5:1
White	6:1	12:1
Black	4:1	4:1
Asian	---	9:1

Notes: Data for Asians are not available in 1999-2000. White, black and Asian include the Hispanic portion of those groups, so the sum of the separate groups will not equal the total. A recent high school dropout refers to a 16- to 24-year-old who was not enrolled in school at the time of the survey, attended school a year earlier, and did not have a high school diploma.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, annual "College Enrollment and Work Activity of High School Graduates" [news releases](#)

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school dropout rate for 16- to 24-year-olds. In October 2000 28% of Hispanic 16- to 24-year-olds were school dropouts according to this measure ([National Center for Education Statistics, 2013](#)). By October 2011 14% of Hispanics in this age group were dropouts.

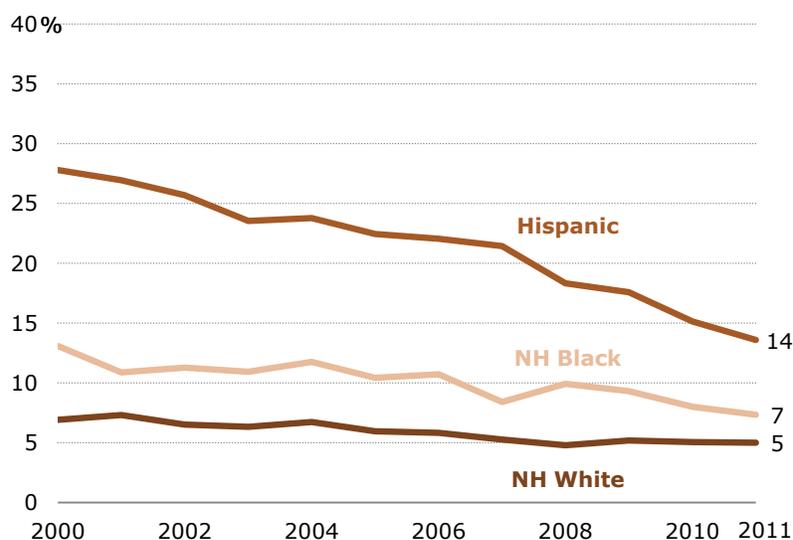
Evidence also suggests that Hispanic students are increasingly likely to graduate from high school (in this instance “graduate” refers to those who obtain a regular high school diploma and does not include students obtaining a GED). A recent comprehensive

investigation of high school graduation rates finds that 78% of Hispanics graduated from high school in 2010, an increase from 64% in 2000 ([Murnane, 2013](#)).

Figure 6

### Status High School Dropout Rates, 2000-2011

(Share of 16-to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not completed high school)



Notes: White and black exclude the Hispanic portion of those groups.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics [The Condition of Education 2012](#), Table 116

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